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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8978
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 6510
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 2505
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 2628
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2890
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RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 003215

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/20/2018

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SUBJECT: DPRK: JAPANESE EXPERT RECOUNTS RODONG SINMUN
CONVERSATION

REF: 10/29 EMBASSY BEIJING E-MAIL (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer per 1.4 (b/d)

Summary

¶1. (S) DPRK expert Hajime Izumi recently recounted for Embassy Tokyo his late October meetings with Lee Yong, Beijing Bureau Chief for North Korea's Rodong Sinmun. During their discussions, Lee stressed that it would be unacceptable for a non-Six Party participant to provide energy assistance to the DPRK; stated that the eight abductees remaining on Japan's official list are dead, and that the only way for Japan to accept this would be for Tokyo and Pyongyang to form a joint investigation committee; and predicted that, in the near term, there would be no improvement in North-South relations. End Summary.

¶2. (S) During a recent meeting with Embassy Tokyo and Washington visitors, Shizuoka University professor and prominent DPRK watcher Hajime Izumi described his late October discussions in Beijing with Lee Yong, Beijing Bureau Chief of the DPRK's Rodong Sinmun Newspaper (reftel). Izumi first met with Lee in 2007, and this was their sixth meeting since then.

Energy Assistance

¶3. (S) According to Lee, the DPRK cannot in principle accept energy assistance from countries outside the Six Parties process. (Note: Lee asked Izumi to "write this point down," which Izumi took to mean that Lee wanted the message passed to the Japanese Government. End Note.) The DPRK had originally tried to resolve the nuclear issue bilaterally with the United States, but the United States had insisted that the countries concerned with the North's nuclear program need to play a role to ensure that the DPRK keeps its promise. In response, the DPRK accepted the Six Party process. Now, if countries like Australia are brought in to provide energy assistance, "the Six Party Talks would become meaningless," Lee said. However, if the United States now prefers to settle the nuclear issue bilaterally with the DPRK, the DPRK would not care about who bears the energy assistance burden, Lee added.

¶4. (S) It is also difficult in principle for the DPRK to allow the United States to cover for Japan, because "this

would give Japan special status" and would be tantamount to permitting Japan to break its Six Party pledge. If Japan continues to refuse to provide energy assistance, the DPRK will again slow down disablement or suspend the process. As a result, the completion of the second phase might be extended into the next U.S. administration, Lee suggested.

Japan-DPRK Relations

15. (S) On abductions, once the DPRK launches its investigative committee, Lee stressed that Japan must carry out its pledge to lift sanctions on North Korea partially -- namely, travel between the two countries and charter flights. That said, the DPRK wonders whether Japan seriously believes that the eight abductees remaining on the government's list are alive. "It is beyond comprehension," Lee said. As such, the job of the DPRK's investigative committee will be to confirm once and for all the deaths of the eight abductees. But, Japan might refuse to accept these conclusions, Lee surmised. Therefore, Japan and the DPRK should form a joint investigative panel in the future and work towards a conclusion that both can acknowledge and accept, Lee suggested.

16. (S) In order to break the deadlock in Japan-DPRK relations, it is necessary to reach an all-encompassing agreement on the settlement of the past and pending bilateral issues, Lee said. However, it is difficult for the two countries to find a mutually acceptable way forward. For the DPRK, normalization, followed by a settlement of the past

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(that is, compensation for Japan's colonial rule) and resolution of other pending issues, is most desirable. However, Japan categorically refuses. On the contrary, Japan wants pending issues settled first, then normalization and the settlement of the past. The DPRK cannot accept this approach because it is not in the spirit of the Pyongyang Declaration. The only feasible way forward is for Japan to provide energy and humanitarian assistance in the context of the Six Party Talks. The DPRK would understand this approach as reflecting Japan's sincere desire to make an effort to settle the past, Lee said.

North-South Relations

17. (S) The DPRK cannot compromise with President Lee Myung-bak, Lee said, and President Lee should change his attitude and policies towards North Korea. Particularly problematic is President Lee's "3000 strategy." The plan's goal of increasing the DPRK's per capita GDP to USD 3,000 harms the DPRK's self-esteem. "It treats the DPRK like a beggar," Lee asserted. Because of the ROK's current stance towards the DPRK, "there is no prospect for improving North-South relations in the near term," Lee said. The key is whether President Lee will change his position or not. The DPRK will not beg the South for food or fertilizer, Lee said.

DPRK Internal Affairs

18. (S) Before meeting with Izumi, Lee told him that he had read Izumi's article on the role of North Korea's National Defense Commission (NDC). Commenting on the article's contents, Lee said "there are no mistakes or parts that need to be fixed." (Note: In a November 2008 Chuo Koron article, Izumi wrote that the DPRK's National Defense Commission will continue to strengthen and grow in influence, even eclipsing the Korean Workers Party. Currently, the NDC's role is similar to that of the Politburo when Kim Il Sung was alive. However, while military officials accounted for around two-thirds of the Politburo's membership, 90 percent of the NDC are military officials, Izumi noted in his article. End

Note.)
SCHIEFFER